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# ELIJAH

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submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
1933

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

WILLIAM A. PROPHETIC MESSAGE

P7499

by  
Paul Doring Halstead  
(A.B., Cornell University, 1931)

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## PREFACE

The mention of Hebrew prophecy brings to mind the names of great eighth century personalities, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. Or it recalls seventh and sixth century prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The eighth and seventh centuries produced the great prophetic figures and the messages which were the inspiration for Israel's crowning era of religious perfection and moral idealism. The prophetic movement in this century has deep historical roots. The sources of Israel's religious revival and of her moral awakening are partly in her history up to this point. This has been recognized by all students of Israel's history and religion. All the books on the prophetic movement begin back in the period of ecstatic or lower prophecy. Some students give larger recognition to this historical source than do others.

The part which Elijah had in the stream of prophecy was tremendously significant. Not the least of the precursors of Amos, Isaiah, and the others we might mention, is this solitary figure, Elijah, towering aloft and dominating the picture of ninth century Israel. Our best knowledge of him comes from a direct study of his age and his personality against the background of his age. We begin, therefore, with a report of the political, economic and social factors which constitute Israel's ninth century environment. Closely following this is a discussion of the sources of our knowledge. The picture of Elijah's world is thus illuminated when the many phases of Israel's history in the ninth century together with the records



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of it are examined. History and religious teaching, as well as fact and legend are here combined. This is separated for the purpose of understanding. Not the least of our efforts is to make the miraculous element contained in the Elijah narratives intelligible. With fact and fancy disentangled, the portrait of the man, Elijah, stands forth. He is a man of flesh and blood and of "like passions with ourselves". The more complete appreciation of Elijah's prophetic message comes in the last chapter dealing with Israel's religious life in the ninth century and the prophet's vital contribution to that phase of her life and especially to the stream of prophecy.

This is not a psychological study of Elijah's prophetic message. If the writer started out with the intention of including a discussion of prophecy from the psychological point of view, he abandoned it for lack of time and knowledge. The point of view is rather historical, critical, and personal with the psychological factors introduced only indirectly.

Certain assumptions regarding the nature of prophecy are contained in this thesis. In the first place, prophecy is seen as a vital part of Israel's life. What T. Crowther Gordon has said in the opening pages of his new book, The Rebel Prophet<sup>1</sup> (Jeremiah) may be well repeated as the writers belief. "If it is true", he states, "that great events in human history

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P. 9.







were provoked by individual human beings exercising their wills to change the directions of human thought and action, then the prophet must be accorded a high place among the vital forces of the race. He it is who has challenged and rebuked each generation, rousing it by a stern denunciation and inflaming it by the emotion of an ideal, and it is through him that fresh burning thoughts are let loose upon the world."

A second assumption regarding the nature of prophecy is that it is intelligible to us. Heretofore the attitude held by many persons, including the scholars, has been largely one of admiration and reverence but not understanding. The prophets have been venerated as God-filled personalities whose psychic mechanism was believed to differ from ours. Even Professor Skinner believes that the experience of the prophets contained a subconscious element, appearing chiefly in the form of vision, which is not characteristic of normal religious life.<sup>1</sup> But who does not have visions in religious experience? The normal thing in a person seized by a religious conviction in surrender to God is to have his whole being, - the conscious, the preconscious, the subconscious mental life brought into expression. The prophet in the midst of his ecstasy approaches more nearly the normal religious experience than the person who never has felt the thrill and rapture in the experience of God. To allow that the prophets derived their message through an abnormal religious experience is to remove them

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<sup>1</sup>

Prophecy and Religion, p. 10.



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from us who seek the normal thing in religion. If on the other hand prophets made their appeal to us through our rational and emotional nature is this not evidence that they received their word from God in the same manner? God is continually seeking men through their rational and emotional natures. God's way is the normal way. Granted the normal includes much mental phenomena heretofore excluded, such as dreams, vision, subconscious and preconscious as well as conscious thought. But such an explanation of the nature of prophetic experience appears to us to be nearer the truth than any view which sharply separates the prophet from us.

Another assumption of prophecy contained herein, is that Elijah differs from the later prophets in the content or ideology of his utterance rather than in the manner in which he received it or delivered it. We must find the variation between Elijah and Amos, for example, in the ideas current in Israel in these two centuries. Conditions of environment differed. These gave rise to issues which demanded very different treatment.

In close connection with this last point we reject another kind of abnormal, or shall we say, impossible interpretation known as verbal prophecy. That the prophet was a passive instrument in the hands of God, who mechanically pushed the pen of the prophet across the page, is a view of prophecy that has long since been abandoned. The prophet is a creative self working in full



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cooperation with God to bring forth God's message to men. In a sense, all men who so work with God are prophets.

The factors that constitute Elijah as a true prophet we may now summarize. These he had in common with the other great prophets of Israel who bear the title, true prophets. (1) A consciousness of God and of being intermediary between the Deity and the nation of Israel. (2) An insight into the deeper meanings and providential significance of political events of the time. This deeper vision gave rise to the element of prediction. (3) A psychic mechanism not vitally different from our own, but admittedly so organized and sensitized as to maintain self-control in the midst of ecstasy and to magnetize the natures of other persons who came into contact with the prophet. (4) A fearlessness and boldness in proclaiming his deepest convictions regardless of consequences to himself and the nation.

Not only may Elijah be said to be a true prophet in that he shares these qualities with the great prophets of a century following. He is a true prophet of the ages for he possessed what all true prophets of God possess. The spiritual succession of the 'Sons of the prophets' has not ceased. Who follows in the train of these is still a prophet in the deepest sense of the word.





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The ninth century with which we deal, witnessed the reign of one of Israel's greatest kings. Our Biblical sources for Omri are scanty, but his greatness is certain and recorded in various works of contemporary history.

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Samaria became the ultimate capital under Omri 887-876.





## CHAPTER I

### POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT OF NINTH CENTURY ISRAEL

#### AFTER THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM:

After the collapse of the Hebrew state in 933 B.C. Old Testament history has to deal with two kingdoms: (1) the kingdom of Judah, or the Southern Kingdom, with its capital at Jerusalem; (2) the Kingdom of Israel, or the Northern Kingdom, with its capital at Samaria.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the fact that the one kingdom had a homogeneity of population, the temple, and the heritage of the Davidic dynasty, the other was superior in size, fertility, political prestige, and religious influence. Israel overshadowed Judah in wealth and numbers. To it belong for two centuries the great political and religious movements, for it was the scene of the great Syrian and Assyrian invasions and of the activity of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, Amos and Hosea.

The ninth century with which we deal, witnesses the reign of one of Israel's greatest kings. Our Biblical sources for Omri are scanty, but his greatness is certain and recorded in various works of contemporary history.

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And Ahab, his son and successor, has been estimated the equal of Solomon in mental grasp and military valor.<sup>1</sup> Israel first came into conflict with Assyria in the reign of Ahab.

In a coalition headed by Benhadad, Ahab with his Israelitish forces opposed the formidable foe, Assyria.<sup>2</sup> The Assyrians were checked at Karkar in the year 853 B.C. More important in this century, however, is the religious activity of Elijah and Elisha. The reign of Ahab is best known to us through the struggle between Jezebel and Elijah.

The militant personage of the queen symbolized the infusion of Tyrian Baalism and courtly ethics in Israel. Elijah is a towering bulwark for Israel's God, Jehovah, and for His ethical code.

#### THE OMRIDE DYNASTY:

Within the period of forty-seven years after the division of the kingdom, i.e. 933 - 887, five kings occupied the throne of Israel. Their reigns witnessed now losses, now gains. Politically, Israel was losing ground when Omri came to the throne in 887. Moab had revolted and extended its territories:

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<sup>1</sup>

Jack, p. 6 - Quotation from Renan.

<sup>2</sup>Ahab contributed the larger contingent of chariotry, - 10,000 men and 2,000 chariots according to the Monolith description coming from Shalmaneser's time. (Barton p. 419)

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Damascus was encroaching on Israel's territory in the Northwest, and the nation had become weakened by civil war and internal feuds.

With the accession of Omri Israel experienced a national uplift, and his reign of twelve years (887-875) was marked by energy and statesmanship. The book of Kings, our Biblical record, tells us almost nothing concerning Amri. Kings 16: 23-28 is a compilation. With a bias for writing religious history to the neglect of political achievement, the compiler accuses Omri of walking in the sins of Jeroboam; then mentions the fact that he had power but leaves out the details. Fortunately, we learn his political importance from external evidence. The Assyrian documents refer to the Kingdom of Israel as the "land of Omri".<sup>1</sup> And after his dynasty was overthrown and Jehu was king, he was known outside Israel as the "Son of Omri".<sup>2</sup>

One of Omri's impressive moves was the transference of the capital to Samaria. He built his palace there on the summit of the hill.<sup>3</sup> Recent excavations reveal something of the extensiveness of this capital.

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<sup>1</sup> The inscription of Adadnirari IV (810-782 B.C.)  
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The work of reconstructing Israel after the pattern of Solomon's kingdom was begun by Omri. Administrative districts were created (1 Kgs. 20: 14-15) either by Omri or Ahab.<sup>1</sup> The Omride dynasty undertook to destroy the old tribal organization and to strengthen the centralizing influence of royal power. We learn from the stele of Mesha that Omri "oppressed Moab" in the time of Chemoshgad, the father of Mesha, that is to say compelled him to pay tribute.<sup>2</sup> The same source tells us that he took from Moab the district of Medeba.

Ahab, the successor of Omri, continued the work of political reconstruction. He has been severely dealt with by the Biblical historian. Religiously, he was considered an apostate for having married a foreign wife and for neglecting to kill off the enemies of Jehovah. But in this he was only following the custom of kings of Israel before him. David married a Philistine or Canaanite princess. Solomon had not only an Egyptian king's daughter, but also princesses from Ammon, another neighboring nation. This was good political strategy.

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1. Lods, p. 378. Jack 312 p. 15 also account p. 13.

2. Barton, G.A., p. 363f.

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We owe the more abundant account of Ahab's reign (1Kings 16:29 - 2 Kings 10) to the religious rather than the political significance of Ahab. The compiler as the original writer of these passages has not failed to see the religious crisis brought on by King Ahab. Of this we shall speak later. Sufficient for our present purpose it is to see that the Hebrews did not distinguish sharply between religion and politics, and whereas our author of Kings saw in the alliance with Tyre and the "cementing by marriage" with Jezebel a move toward religious apostasy and Baalism, moderns see in it a strengthening political move as well, and an initiative measure toward larger commercial activity.

One of his first moves seems to have been the enlarging of his palace. This was perhaps a first step in impressing foreign powers. Just west of Omri's palace is Ahab's ivory palace. ( I Kings 22:39, cf. Ps. 45:8)\* It was probably during this process that he came into conflict with Naboth, a citizen.<sup>1</sup> But this enlarging of his own domain was only one step. We have mentioned his part in creating the administrative districts as a move in centralizing the kingdom. The

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See diagram in Jack SAT p. 12 also account p. 16.

<sup>1</sup>

Ibid: p. 2.

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\* See diagram in Jack SAT p. 18 also account p. 16.



larger program of establishing relations with neighboring kingdoms Ahab undertook with even greater zest. In fact, our best understanding of him and his dynasty is against the background of the international situation, i.e. in relation to Phoenicia, Damascus, and Assyria.<sup>1</sup> Ahab well understood that in order to save Israel as a nation he must be free to concentrate all his forces against the Arameans of Damascus, his most dangerous enemies. Hence, he established close relations with the King of Tyre, Ethbaal or Ithobaal, which enabled him to close his enemies' access by way of Phoenicia. This move had an economic basis likewise. It gave Israel not only an ally on the North but convenient markets and seaports for their trade. Like the 'Canaanites' they were 'traffickers' (cf. Hosea 12:7) though they probably had no trading vessels on the Mediterranean sea.<sup>2</sup> "These activities seem to have been limited almost entirely during the whole of the monarchy and even to the close of the State (in A.D. 70), to the sale or purchase of agricultural products, cattle and land (Amos 8:5; Hosea 12:8-9), and to the exchange of such products for what a poet calls 'the abundance of the sea, and the

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Jack p. 106.

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Jack p. 110. Note: The Biblical records do not say anything about increase of commerce, but it must have been considerable.



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Jack p. 108.

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hidden treasures of the sand' i.e. for articles imported by sea or manufactured by the peoples of the coast, such as glass or purple (Deut. 33:18-19)"<sup>1</sup>

The Tyrians on their side found alliance extremely advantageous; for the corn and other products of Palestine were indispensable to the coastal cities.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand it was to the interest of the Phoenicians to prevent the Arameans from reaching the Mediterranean through Israelitic territory and becoming competitors.

As a further gesture toward international "good will" Ahab erected in Samaria a temple to Baal. Built with an economic and political motive it was to have far reaching results for religion and was to lead to the downfall of the dynasty. A prudent measure from Ahab's point of view, it was otherwise thought of by Elijah. Of this we shall speak.

#### INTERNAL POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

Israel was a religious nation. Her greatest contribution to the ages is religious and ethical truth. The greatness of her history lies in the spiritual insight of her prophets. But this religious heritage

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<sup>1</sup>  
Lods p. 390.

<sup>2</sup>  
Acts 12:20; cf. Ez. 27:17. (Lods p. 379.)





and these God-filled personalities did not spring forth full-grown from Israel's altars or from her sanctuaries. The prophets were heaven-sent, but were earth born. And their message, divine in origin, was conditioned by human considerations. Political and economic organization are instrumental toward molding the prophetic word. Elijah is a product of the ninth century. A religious personality, a prophet of God, a saint and hero to succeeding generations in Israel, Elijah, nevertheless, preached in response to political and economic conditions of which he was a part. We have seen how the Omride dynasty is moving toward more highly organized society. Greater centralization, a more complete and efficient system of administration, an effective military organization characterizes the dynasties of Omri and Ahab. These rulers aimed to make Israel a political and commercial factor to be reckoned with by other nations. But such a goal was out of harmony with the genius of Israel. Internal Israel was not in sympathy with Ahab. In fact, Ahab however great he was in his "intellectual grasp and military valor" never knew his nation, and was never in sympathy with its deepest longings and aspirations.

"Note: The document coming from this period (11th-10th B.C.) is a reflection of the devotion of popular mind to heroic stories, - the pastoral tradition of Israel.

Levi p. 115-116

Levi p. 233





Israel still retained to a very high degree the outlook of Aramean nomads.\* When the Hebrews arrived in Palestine some few centuries before, they were organized, like all the nomadic Semites, into tribes and clans; but as a result of settlement in Canaan this organization underwent profound changes. Restriction of individualism characteristic of Bedouins was a necessary accompaniment of statehood. The pressure of political necessity forced the tribes to accept a monarchy. Israel indeed accepted the Canaanitic belief in the sacred and semi-divine character of the King.<sup>1</sup> He is the "consecrated one" (Nazir), the anointed of Jahweh; it is a sacrilege to lift a hand against him. (I Sam 24:7, 11; 26:9-11; II Sam 1:14-16)<sup>2</sup> He was believed to have power, like the god-men of primitive peoples, since it was he who caused famine. (II Kings 6:26-7). The king might even claim the title, son of God. (II Sam 6:14). He had a priestly function (I Kings 8:54-61). Then, too, his office was made impressive by the outward signs of power. The earliest insignia of royalty were the spear, borne by the ancient sheiks and the bracelet (2 Sam 1:10; cf. 2 Kgs 2:12); and the crown. Court etiquette was highly elaborate in

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\*Note: The document coming from this period (i.e. 800 B.C.) is a reflection of the devotion of popular mind to Nomadic stories, - the pastoral tradition of Israel.

<sup>1</sup>  
Lods p. 118-9.

<sup>2</sup>  
Ibid. p. 393.





Ahab's time, - heritage from David and an imitation of neighboring peoples. (II Sam 14:4; I Kgs 16:23) Elijah must have been an offender at this point. (I Kgs 17:1)

At the same time the very existence of the kingdom was dependent upon the recognition by royalty of legitimate limitations. The divine origin of the King was a theoretical matter with Israel. Only kings like Solomon or Ahab were, by reason of prestige and personal power, able to impose their will on the people.<sup>1</sup> There were limits on the king's power. There were the elders, i.e. heads of principal families who continued to meet at the gate of the city to dispense justice and discuss the affairs of the city.<sup>2</sup> Ahab consults the "elders of the law" (I Kgs. 20:7). Then the kings placed over communal aristocracy officials of their own appointment (sarim). Their duties consisted of levying taxes, raising troops, and hearing appeals. Litigants appeal to the king (IKgs 3:16-28), but otherwise the law-abiding citizen might spend his

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<sup>1</sup>  
Lods p. 394.

<sup>2</sup>  
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whole life in the "midst of the people", i.e. within the clan, without ever having anything to do with the king. (II Kgs 4:13)<sup>1</sup>

There was no constitution in Israel, - no written law of the Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> The law was unwritten custom and mores. The Hebrews had reached in the anti-monarchic period a high state of justice. I Samuel 8:11-18 is a satirical description of tyrannies practiced by the kings which according to the writer were "the custom". Here, too, are some of the practices of the institution of monarchy most strenuously resisted. Some are necessarily restrictions growing out of statehood; some are of the nature of "bondage". For example, the commandeering of Israelitic maidens for the court ("He will take your daughters to be perfumers, to be cooks, and to be bakers"), - this is of the nature of servitude. A more serious limitation is the practice of seizure of fields and vineyards to provide rewards for the king's officials or estates for sons (I Sam 22:7). Ezekiel mentions this (46:16-18), in this connection he deprecates the return of the practice.

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<sup>1</sup>  
Lods p. 395.

<sup>2</sup>  
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This last custom is of special concern to us in our study of Ahab's reign. Under law the king was bound not to seize the land of a citizen even for his ivory palace. The principle of individual ownership was deeply rooted. A simple, recalcitrant citizen could force the king to bow, in appearance at least, to the prescription of an immemorial custom by which a man's ancestral inheritance was inviolable (I Kgs 21). Even Ahab was obliged to resort to a false accusation followed by the semblance of a trial in order to obtain possession of Naboth's vineyard.

#### SOCIAL CHANGES

Among nomads the poorest member of the tribe is equal to the richest. All partake of the same simple food, wear the same coarse clothing, and inhabit the tent. Wealth meant nothing unless it involved in a few cases the privilege of greater hospitality. But this social equality underwent change in Canaan. In the sedentary agricultural stage more skilful farmers emerged and thus gained prestige over their fellows. The custom of land tenure made possible individual property gain and individual prosperity. Then these Hebrews were shrewd folk (Amos 8:5; Hosea 12:8-9).

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The basis of Israel's economic life was the small peasant farmer, the 'Crofter', who lived on the plot that had belonged to his family. Owners of property were the true citizens. There were larger farms, but a person who owned one was regarded as especially wealthy. Whether the farm were large or small, it was worked almost entirely by the owner and his household. In larger families slaves, temporary or permanent, and also, possibly hired laborers, might be included. As long as there were men to do the work, provided the season was not a drought; provided, too, there was not too great an exportation<sup>1</sup> or what was even more probable - a raid from without, a comfortable living could be had in the fertile lands of Palestine. But the failure of one of these conditions meant hardship. (Am 4:9; 2:6) A solitary woman had a bitter struggle at any time, especially in famine periods.<sup>2</sup>

Industry played little part among the Israelites. Few crafts are mentioned in Hebrew literature. Among the few craftsmen are the wandering smith, unskilled in art (I Sam 13:20-21); the carpenter, who combined the

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Jack p. 112 - Amos 4:9.

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craft of metal and stone (the *harash* <sup>1</sup> = hewer). Besides the craftsmen was the potter, a crude imitator of foreign models. In the cities there was a larger specialization of the crafts. There were fullers, weavers, jewellers, locksmiths, barbers. (I Kgs 1:9; I Sam 17:7; II Kgs. 24:14, 16; Ez. 5:1). Despite the efforts of the kings Solomon and Ahab (I Kgs. 20:34) to increase the international prestige of Israel, commerce continues to be carried on largely by the Phoenicians.<sup>2</sup> But the military organization was larger and more commanding in Ahab's time owing to the increase in the force of chariotry. It was half as large again as in Solomon's day. In II Kgs. 1:9ff we hear expressly of captains of fifty. This is a small unit, and must have been included in larger bodies,<sup>3</sup> probably thousands. This group was doubtless enriched by the spoils of war and royal favor.

All this points to a mode of life increasingly removed from primitive simplicity of Israel's society. Social rank is now highly desirable. The rich demanded palaces resembling those of the king, with winter and summer houses, a luxury which appeared in the eighth

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Lods p. 389. The "*harash*" is distinguished according as he is a worker in iron (II Chron. 24:12), in stone (II Sam. 5:11), in wood (II Sam. 5:11).

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#### CONSERVATISM IN THE NINTH CENTURY; ITS FAILURE

Conservatism is not a phenomenon of any one century. It is not a product of nineteenth century thought or of our own day. Nor is conservatism confined to any one country. It is rather an enduring sentiment in human nature. For the most part associated with religion and describing that tendency to devote oneself to past religious ideals, conservatism is at the same time effective in other areas of human life, - in political organization, in economics and in social structures.

There was a conservative element in the Israel of the ninth century B.C. There had always been, at least since the nomadic days, a conservative wing in Israel's political and social life. In the ninth century this party came into prominence by reason of its contrasting

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position with other more liberal elements. As we have already discovered, Israel retained to a very high degree the outlook of the Aramean nomads and the traditional ancestors of Israel, who had made good their footing centuries before. This nomadic ideal was bound to assert itself in opposition to increasing "modernization". Of course, ninth century Israel had its laws protecting the rights of the weak against the encroachments of the strong. The kings and priests of Israel understood that it was their duty to intervene in social conflict which was dividing people. The collection of civil laws embodied in the "book of the covenant" was edited about 850 B.C. It required liberation after six years of the Hebrew who had become a slave because of debt (Ex. 21:2-6). Other measures are in favor of the poor (Ex. 22:25-7; 23:10-11).<sup>1</sup> But these measures were palliatives and ineffective to bring about a change on the part of the king and court. Some entertained a more radical idea. Among this number Jehonadab, the son of Rechab, the Kenite, was the leader. The position of this right wing conservative party simply stated was this: Since the settlement in Palestine, Israel had gone astray, and the hope of recovery lay in a complete rejection

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of 'civilization' and all its accompaniments of foreign alliances, foreign wives, and foreign gods. Jehonadab, as leader of this party, imposed on his followers the observance of nomad customs, heretofore a matter of tradition. This had, of course, religious sanction. (II Kgs. 10:15-16; 23)

He must have had a large following. The Rechabites come in for some prominence in this period. They lived in tents and kept alive the nomadic ideal. When Jehu came to the throne he seemed to give recognition to the movement by his friendly attitude toward Jehonadab.<sup>1</sup> This may be interpreted, however, as a shrewd political move. By his gesture he proclaimed himself vindicator of the rights of the national god. He was even willing to go to the impossible extreme of massacre in punishing the opponents of this national Deity.<sup>2</sup> But Jehu did not have any constructive political or social reform program. He seems not to have been in actual sympathy with Jehonadab and the Rechabites. Rather, he was one of the majority of the Israelites who were too completely absorbed in the habits and tastes of a sedentary life to be able to divest themselves of it.

But a failure of the king to restore decadent Israel was part of the result of the short-sightedness of the

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II Kings 10:15

<sup>2</sup> Olmstead in his chapter on Reforms of Blood describes vividly the zeal of Jehu for religious reform by massacres pp. 288ff.



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prophets of the time. They did not see, as did the eighth century prophets, that the nation was corrupt to the core and doomed to destruction.<sup>1</sup> An exception might be drawn in the case of Elijah. "Elijah was the hero and leader of the reaction of which Jehonadab was a symptom. Jehonadab contented himself with the salvation of his own clan; Elijah preached the crusade among the people at large."<sup>2</sup> Of course, he is best remembered as a defender of Jahwe. He vindicated the national deity. At the same time Elijah defended the rights of man.<sup>3</sup> On a particular occasion he stands before Ahab and, indifferent to the king's power, he fearlessly condemns him for having invaded the rights of Naboth, an ordinary citizen in Israel. But while it may be said that Elijah arose above the level of his order and produced a great impression, especially in the offence of Ahab against Naboth, we must conclude that the total effect of his prophetic activity against the king was slight.<sup>4</sup> Elijah was attacking Baalism and in so far as his preaching was understood as a protest

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Lods p. 423.

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Smith OTH p. 191

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Kittel HH Vol. II p. 266.

4

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<sup>1</sup> I  
Ibid. p. 483.

<sup>2</sup> Smith OTH p. 191

<sup>3</sup> Kittel HN Vol. II p. 268.

<sup>4</sup> Wellhausen is extreme in saying Elijah has no effect p. 298.



against foreign culture, especially Canaanitic culture, he was sowing seeds of unrest in Israel's corporate life. The total effect of his preaching, however, was future rather than present. His spirit persisted, working in the army, among the citizens, in the prophets<sup>1</sup> after his day, and among the Rechabites. Elijah's failure to accomplish immediate effects resulted more from Israel's indifference to her decadent condition than from his short-sightedness. Crusading among the people at large, bringing the king to moral judgment in the particular instance of Naboth, still this was not the opportunity for social revolution, and reform was ineffective.

The occasion for more permanent reform came a century later when the prophets had the support of the people in their denunciation of corruption, and covetousness, of greed and luxurious living among the rich and leading citizens of the nation.

We may sum up this period from the standpoint of political and economic organizations by concluding that already in Ahab's reign the seeds are being sown which will lead to disaster, and there are elements within the nation which will constitute a grave peril. "For Israel

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perished, not merely because of the power of Assyria, but also because of her own inherent failure to maintain her standards. There was a social and political cancer within the body politic which made ruin sooner or later inevitable. It is possible that an internally healthy Israel, might, in the end, have had to succumb to Assyria, but, as the clearest minds in her midst saw, she was suffering from diseases which must<sup>1</sup> in any event have proved fatal."

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<sup>1</sup>

Oesterley - Robinson Vol. I H.I. p 333.





## CHAPTER II THE SOURCES OF OUR KNOWLEDGE

We have now come to the place in our study where it is necessary to gain a first-hand knowledge of the sources of our information. Our discussion of the political and economic life of Israel in Ahab's time is based upon archeological findings as well as the Bible narratives. On the other hand, we get our religious history almost entirely from the Books of Kings. The Elijah narratives are confined to only a few chapters, i.e. I Kings 17-19, 21; II Kings 1-2. These present difficulties as we shall see.

### ARCHEALOGY AND THE BOOKS OF KINGS

The most recent book shedding light on this subject is Professor J.W. Jack's Samaria in Ahab's Time. In this he states significant conclusions on the Harvard excavations in Samaria. These excavations disclose important new facts and give us fresh knowledge of Israel in Ahab's time. Here is a new picture of Samaria, with its royal and civil administration, and supplementing the scanty historical material in the Bible. To this book we have referred in our presentation of the political and social environment of ninth century Israel. Professor Jack also has a chapter on religion in Ahab's reign. Inasmuch as some of his conclusions made

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regarding Israel's religion consist of a fresh interpretation of Biblical sources supplemented by the recent archaeological findings we shall refer to him again in our discussion of that subject.

To Dr. George A. Barton goes much credit for the work of compiling archaeological findings up to 1916. In his chapter on Archaeological Light on the Books of Kings will be found a detailed discussion of the subject. It is sufficient for our purposes to restate some of the conclusions which are found in his books. First of all, the Eponym Canon is the name given by scholars to the chronological lists of the Assyrians. A highly significant find this is since by it we may date accurately Ahab's reign and other events in Israel. The Hebrews<sup>1</sup> were never greatly concerned about keeping accurate records. Sheshonk I (924-900 B.C.), the founder of the twenty-second Egyptian dynasty is the Shishak of the Bible (I Kings 14; 25-28). Conquered Asiatic cities which he has listed on a pylon in the temple of Karnak are mentioned in the Bible. For example, we have here Megiddo (Joshua 12:21; Judges 1:27), Beth-horan (Joshua 10:10), Shumen (II Kings 4:8) etc. The first approach of an Assyrian king into Hebrew territory is not recorded in the Bible, but it is clear that Ashurnasirpal, king of Assyria, (884-860 B.C.), though he did not actually come into contact with the Israelites, took tribute from their neighbors, the

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Smith, OTH p. 202.

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Tyrians and Sidonians. Of greater interest to us is the Assyrian cuneiform text in which Shalmaneser mentions Ahab as fighting with the Arameans of Damascus and others against him at the Battle of Karkar (853 B.C.). The Bible is silent about this. It does, however, enable us to understand Ahab's sudden change of policy toward Damascus (I Kings 20:34-43). Ahab had to put aside his animosity toward Damascus in order to protect his kingdom from the larger menace of Assyria. Similarly, we may assume, the marriage of Ahab and Jezebel, which had such disastrous religious consequences, was in the first instance a political measure directed against Damascus.<sup>2</sup>

We have mentioned the reference of Shalmaneser to the king of Israel as "the son of Omri". This is on the black obelisk of Shalmaneser III. He tells of tribute received from Jehu in 842 B.C. Although Jehu is not a descendant of Omri, that he should be called the Son of Omri, and Israel known on the Assyrian monuments as "the land of the house of Omri", is evidence that Omri was a more significant ruler than the short summary account in I Kings 16:23-28 would lead us to believe. The Moabite inscription of Mesha (cf. II Kings 3:4) with its statement that "Omri oppresses Moab many days" gives support

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<sup>1</sup>  
Barton, p. 418.

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to the same contention. It supplements the Biblical account and mentions many persons and places well known from the Bible. At the same time it relates events not in the Bible account.<sup>1</sup> Upon it Mesha recorded the victories which his god Chemosh had given him over Israel.

These archaeological and epigraphic data have the inestimable value of establishing for us reliable chronological points of reference; also something of international politics and history. But so far the monuments are only fragmentary evidence directly relating to this history. Any attempt at reconstruction of Ahab's reign must depend mainly upon the literary sources in the Books of Kings which have survived, owing to the fact that they have found a place in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE LITERARY SOURCES

Scholarship is pretty much agreed on the literary questions raised by the Books of Kings. Difference of opinion arises concerning the significance of the events related for Israel's history. It is clear as Dr. E.W. Barnes points out in his introduction to the Book of Kings that by virtue of its contents, it belongs as much to the prophetic books as to the historical. It is not a continuous chronicle; it is a book of prophetic teaching

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<sup>1</sup> Barton, p. 422.

<sup>2</sup> Lods, p. 9.







in which sometimes history, sometimes story, is employed as a vehicle of teaching. It enforces the principle that God is the controlling power and sin the disturbing force in the entire history of men and nations.<sup>1</sup> It is well to keep in mind in this connection Professor Skinner's definition of the three kinds of history. First are narrative or descriptive histories, written simply to describe events, which for the writer appear important. The writer's own subjective nature is the standard for selecting these outward events. Then there is didactic or pragmatic history. From the point thus taken history is a storehouse of political or ethical or religious lessons. The scientific view of history, last of all, is also last in point of time. This belongs to the modern age. Scientific history seeks to exhibit events in their true relations to the great social and spiritual movements to which they owe their ultimate significance.<sup>2</sup>

We are not to think of the Books of Kings as history in the last sense, but rather as combining narrative and pragmatic elements. The Books in their present form are a compilation. Furthermore, Kings, like Samuel, formed originally a single undivided work. The existing division into two books, which is as ancient as the Greek version,

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<sup>1</sup> Barnes: Cambridge Bible, Intro. XXXIII.

<sup>2</sup> Skinner: Century Bible, p. 5.



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1 Barnes: Cambridge Bible, Intro. XXXIII.

2 Skinner: Cambridge Bible, p. 6.



unlike Samuel corresponds to no marked turn in history. Rather, it divides the narrative in the middle of the unimportant reign of Ahaziah of Israel. Therefore, we may consider the two Books as a unity.<sup>1</sup> This compilation is based on pre-existent written sources. Both from the religious content and from the nature of the phraseology it appears that these sources have been altered and compiled from the Deuteronomistic point of view. Therefore, we know that the compiler lived around 600 B.C., i.e. some years after the religious revival under Josiah in 621 B.C. The different sources from which the compiler drew may be represented best by a diagram. It will also be noted from the diagram that other later changes were introduced to alter the book.<sup>2</sup> For our purposes it is necessary to inquire more particularly into the nature of the prophetic narratives which were partly written before 722 B.C., i.e. the date of the fall of Samaria. (See Diagram) Something must be said also, about the records in Kings within which prophetic narratives and those dealing with Elijah and Elisha particularly appear.

The Books of Kings may be treated conveniently in three parts: (1) I Kings 1-11 - Solomon; (2) I Kings 1:12 - II Kings : 17 - Israel and Judah; (3) II Kings 18-25 - Judah.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gray, p. 76.

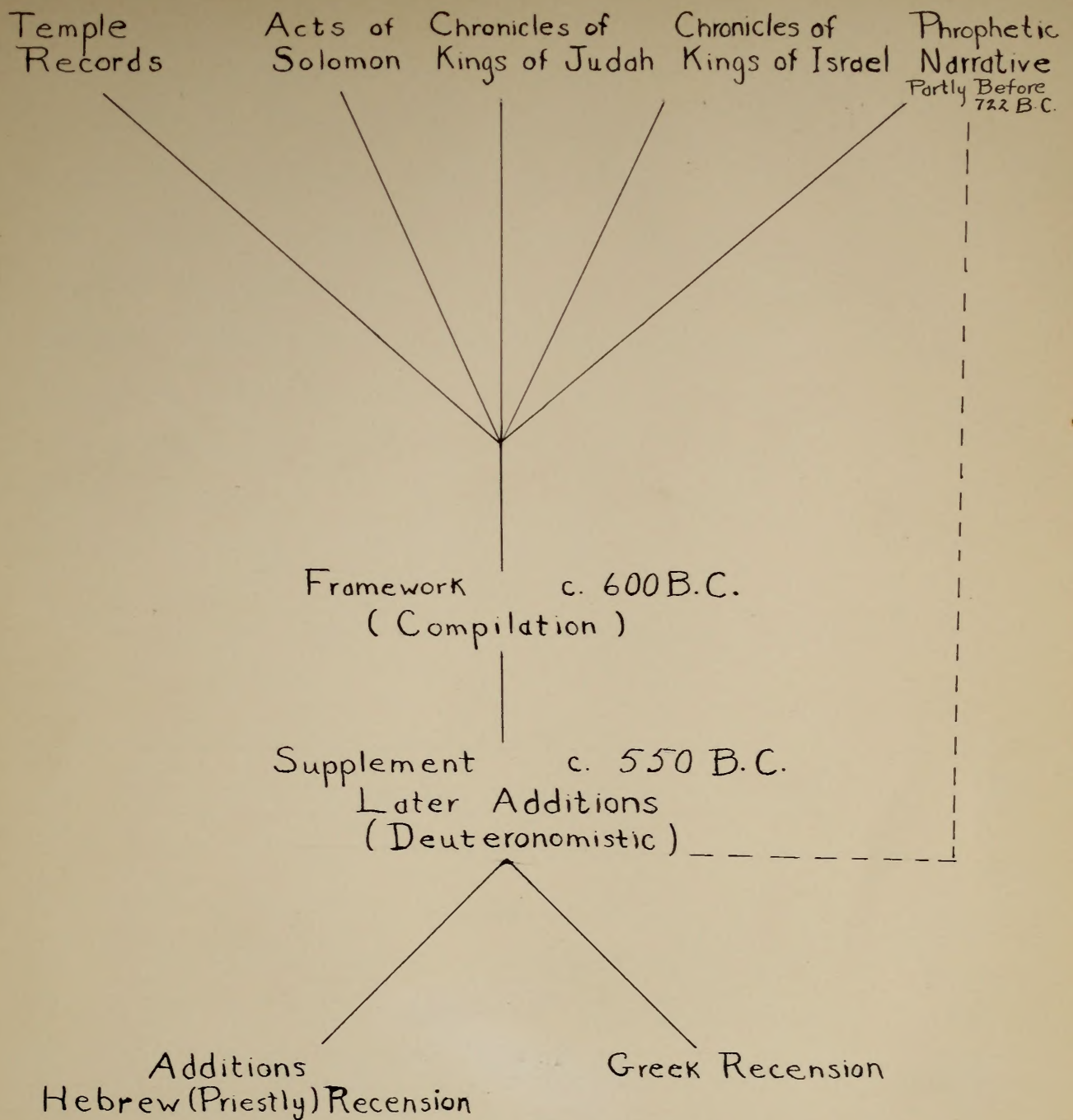
<sup>2</sup> Gray, p. 86. (Reproduced on p. 27a of this thesis).

<sup>3</sup> Driver, p. 186.

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The first part dealing with Solomon refers to the chronicle or record kept during his reign. For the later two parts there is less certainty among scholars. It has been questioned whether the "Books" referred to in Kings are the official records of the two kingdoms or two independent historical works based upon them. Scholars prefer the latter alternative<sup>1</sup> though the difference is not important. In either case the two books were summaries of events of national importance with names and lists of officers.

In the narrative portions two elements are distinguishable: (1) brief statistical notices relating to events of political importance sometimes called the Epitome; (2) longer, continuous narratives, describing usually occurrences in which the prophets were more or less directly concerned. In form the Epitome is the work of the compiler.<sup>2</sup> But the particulars embraced in it are derived from the two books named. The longer narrative did not form a part of the official annals, i.e. these related public acts. They were taken by the compiler from independent sources. It is quite possible that he made changes. Similarities to the style and form of the framework are his expansions. What changes he introduces are slight. This we may infer from the fact that the compiler, working over the narratives subsequent to the

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Deuteronomistic redaction of Israel's history in 612 B.C., does not introduce the Deuteronomistic standard into the narratives. These long important and impressive sections of the books of Kings (I Kings 17-II Kings 8, 13:14-21) have been preserved intact. The Elijah narratives not only recognize the existence of altars all over the land (I Kings 19:10), but the great contest between Jahweh and Baal is actually decided at the Sanctuary on Carmel (18:20) which tradition says was a place used by the Phoenicians for worship of their baals and which for the Hebrews (subsequent to 621) was illegal. Furthermore, bull-worship at Bethel and Dan is not condemned by Elijah nor does the compiler point out his failure at this point. Our conclusion with regard to the compilation is this: The compiler took the narrative as he found it dating from between 800 and 722 B.C.; introduced no change in content but probably made slight changes and transitions in arranging what was for him the proper order.

#### A STUDY OF THE TEXT OF THE ELIJAH-ELISHA NARRATIVES

We have no evidence that either Elijah or Elisha did any writing. Events are recorded about them, and the spirit of their messages rather than any long discourses by them have been remembered and recorded. Inasmuch as Elijah and Elisha were associated with the schools of the prophets of their day ( II Kings 2), the authors of the narratives



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must have come from such groups. We may be certain that these contemporary prophets with the exception of Micaiah (I Kings 22:13) were inferior in their message. Yet we depend on these lesser unnamed persons who approached the spiritual stature of an Elijah to tell us about him. It will be seen that these disciples from the schools wrote independently about their heroes. Such an explanation is the only one that can account for marked differences in style, content, languages and disparity within them. That one author did not depend upon another, but rather that all wrote about the same time is clear from the vividness and self-evidencing truth which are tests of contemporary authorship. The narratives belong to a time but little subsequent to Elijah, i.e. about 875 - 800 B.C.

We now come to a direct examination of the Biblical records. First of all, it is evident that the compiler breaks his framework of history at the end of chapter 16 to admit these extracts of poetic narrative written and preserved in the schools of the prophets of the day. Chapters 17-19 introduce us directly to Elijah and form a unity. Some have supposed that the narrative is mutilated at the beginning since we are introduced to the prophet on the stage of<sup>1</sup> action in later manhood, rather than to him in early life.

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Oesterly, Vol. I p. 305.

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Here is not a preliminary scene of early life portrayal as in the narrative of Moses, of Samuel, or of David. Rather here is the narrative of his advent upon the central stage<sup>1</sup> of his career.

Scholarship is fairly agreed that chapters 17-19 form a unity and are the product of one author. However, some scholars (Skinner, Simpson in Abingdon and others) seem to be correct in believing that at Chapter 19:19 the extract of another Elijah tradition is introduced. Skinner says that "there is a lacuna in the Elijah document between verses 18 and 19 and the inference is strengthened by the observation that verse 19 is not the natural continuation of verses 15-18."<sup>2</sup> This narrative follows the tradition that Elijah continued his prophetic work through political means by the appointment of Elisha.

Micklem in his Prophecy and Eschatology has the unique but doubtful explanation that chapter 19 does not form a unity and the story of the theophany on Horeb is made up of two narratives stitched together in a most confusing manner.<sup>3</sup> Actually the confusion arises from the fact that vv. 9b - 11a seem out of place and spoil by anticipation the dramatic effect of the theophany vv. 11b ff. And these verses are again

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At the end of chapter 19 the compiler interrupts the story of Elijah. He introduces us to an account preserved from Ahab's reign which has to do with political events. This extract is a valuable correction of chapters 17-19. In chapter 20 and again in chapter 22 Ahab rather than Elijah is the hero. He is courageous and capable rather than the weak tool of Jezebel as in chapters 17-19. After this recitation of Ahab's military achievements attention is turned again to another vital phase of Elijah's work. The point of view of chapter 21 is ethical. The author deals with the effect of Elijah's preaching in a specific incidence where

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ethical considerations are at stake. Peake says this<sup>1</sup> is not a part of the Elijah story of 17-19. It is probably, though not certainly, an independent narrative of Elijah, for it differs in style and Elijah does not occupy the central place; Ahab is not represented in his worst light; the great offender is Jezebel who acts not so much as a Baal-worshipper as in chapters 17-19 as the queen of Israel. Gordon in The Prophets of the Old Testament<sup>2</sup> says that this is apparently to be connected with chapters 17-19 and belongs to a similar order of narratives.

Moreover, he summarizes scholarship on the reconstruction of the order. He says that this can hardly be regarded as a sequel to the scene at Horeb which looks forward to the passing of Elijah (19:15 ff.). Ewald and other scholars place the story before the ordeal on Carmel (18:19 ff.), as more directly appealing to the sympathy of the people, and making possible the sequel victory. Gordon believes that a better climax is gained by reading it after Carmel. The two great moments in Elijah's ministry are thus set in effective relation, and the picture of his depression in the desert is the psychological reaction following the disappointment of his grand ambition.<sup>3</sup> There follows a reawakening on Mt. Horeb, Jahwe's traditional dwelling-place.

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<sup>1</sup> Peake, p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> P. 26n.

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<sup>2</sup> P. 326.

<sup>3</sup> Skinner (Century) p. 336.



The passage should be connected with the theophany of Moses in Exodus 33:21, 22 which the author seems to have in mind. Jahwe appeals to Elijah through his rational processes and through his emotional nature to make a final fulfillment of his task in the appointment of men who will continue his spirit. They are Hazael as king over Syria, Jehu as king over Israel, and Elisha, successor who is in line for the prophetic office.

II Kings 1 is the third and concluding Bible narrative about Elijah. The picture in chapter 1:2-4 resembles that of Elijah in the first two narratives 17-19 and 21. As there, so here, he appears suddenly; and as quickly he vanishes. He is here, as there, the prophet of doom to the royal house and the zealous proclaimer of Jahwe. Verses 5-18, however, seem to portray an Elijah playing a part scarcely worthy of the hero of I Kings 17-19 or 21. In the first narrative he was zealous for Jahwe as opposed to the Tyrian Baal. In the second Elijah stands for righteousness as opposed to legalized violence. Here the king's offence is that he sent to a Philistine oracle instead of inquiring of Jahwe, and his soldiers are punished by fire.<sup>1</sup> Here the element of the supernatural and miraculous is much more conspicuous than in former narratives where a restrained use

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of miracles is a striking feature. The narrative is clearly later and intended to inculcate respect for the prophet and his office. The story has affinities in I Samuel 19:18f. and I Kings 13.<sup>1</sup>

In chapter 2 of II Kings we have our last view of the prophet. But here we have entered into the domain of Elisha narratives. As there were narratives, perhaps a Narrative on the Life of Elijah so there were traditions and anecdotes respecting Elisha. A large number are preserved in the earlier part of 2 Kings (Chapters 2, 4-6, 8:1-15; 13:14-21). They are independent of the Elijah narratives; and reflect the general character of Elisha's work which touched at much lower levels than that of his great predecessor.<sup>2</sup> Skinner gives the reasons agreed upon by scholars for regarding chapter 2:1-18 on the translation of Elijah as an introduction to the group of Elisha narratives, rather than the close of the biography of Elisha. He believes that the narrative would form a worthy sequel to I Kings 17-19 were it not for new features. We may summarize these: (1) Elijah's close relations to the prophetic guilds never alluded to in the Elijah narratives. (2) In I Kings 19 Elisha is already designated as Elijah's successor and invested with his mantle. (3) The situation

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<sup>1</sup> Abingdon, p. 429.

<sup>2</sup> Skinner, Century, p. 277.

of miracles is a striking feature. The narrative is clearly later and intended to inculcate respect for the prophet and his office. The story has affinities in I Samuel 19:18-24, and I Kings 18.

In chapter 3 of II Kings we have our last view of the prophet. But here we have entered into the domain of Elisha narratives. As there were narratives, perhaps a narrative on the life of Elisha so there were traditions and anecdotes respecting Elisha. A large number are preserved in the earlier part of II Kings (Chapters 2, 4-6, 8:1-10; 13:14-21). They are independent of the Elisha narratives; and reflect the general character of Elisha's work which touched at much lower levels than that of his great predecessor. Skinner gives the reasons agreed upon by scholars for regarding chapter 2:1-18 as the translation of Elisha as an introduction to the group of Elisha narratives, rather than the close of the biography of Elisha. He believes that the narrative would form a worthy sequel to I Kings 19:1-18 were it not for new features. We may summarize these: (1) Elisha's close relations to the prophetic guilds never alluded to in the Elisha narratives. (2) In I Kings 19 Elisha is already designated as Elisha's successor and invested with his mantle. (3) The situation



is entirely in harmony with that found in the stories concerning Elisha and with the representation of life within the prophetic guilds as it is there described. We assign this chapter to the series of narratives with which it has the closest affinities, those, namely pertaining to the life of Elisha.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE RELATIONSHIP OF ELIJAH AND ELISHA STORIES

The relation of the Elijah and Elisha stories is an interesting one. A study of the former gives support to the contention that they are among the finest portions of the Old Testament. The author was a reflective person - something of an artist and a poet. On the other hand the Elisha narratives are inferior in every way. Written probably fifty years later than the Elijah narratives, at a time more removed from their hero, they are more overlaid with miraculous and supernatural accretions. It is possible to distinguish an early stratum of valuable information in them (II Kings 3; 7:24-7, 20). At the same time there are among them additions recalling "puerile monkish legends" and containing doublets with the life of Elijah. The author (or authors) of these later narratives is less gifted with creative ability and dramatic power possessed by the author of the Elijah-Epic. Here are marks of poor imitation. The miracles of Elijah are repeated in the

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Skinner, Century, p. 278. See also Abingdon, p. 429.

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story of Elisha with less restraint and fewer evidences of originality. Elijah healed the widow's son, Elisha the Shunamite woman's; Elijah performed the miracle of the cruse of oil, Elisha filled the jars of the prophet's wife; Elijah brought rain in time of drought and Elisha with slight variation did the same. What this second author tries to do is to approach the portrayal of Elijah in this description of Elisha. This he does by giving us glimpses of Elisha, which we have no reason to deny, at the same time making his story something of a copy - an imitation of Elijah based on current traditions regarding him.

This last view makes such an opinion as Hölischer's (*Die Propheten*, p. 177 (1914) impossible. He believes that there is little reliable record of Elijah, but that most of the stories relating to him are reflections of narratives originally belonging to Elisha.<sup>1</sup> But the Elisha narratives are the inferior - an imitation of the superior Elijah story. The opposite of this theory; namely that the Elisha narratives are copies of the Elijah narratives with miracle accretions, seems more nearly the truth in the case. Both prophets lived; by almost universal consent Elijah was outstanding. Even the Elisha narratives (Especially II Kings 2) support this view.

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## A PORTRAIT OF ELIJAH

### A DRAMATIC PORTRAYAL

The drama of Elijah's life is now before us. We have said that the exact sequence of the scenes is not known. It appears that the compiler has arranged them in order as tradition left them. The length of time covered by events according to the Biblical account is around three years. The principle action takes place at the end of that time, when the drought approaches its end and provides the setting for the reawakening of vital religion. This finds its motivation in the desire to worship the ancestral God, Jahwe, at an abandoned altar on Mount Carmel.

The chief actor in these events is Elijah, the leading prophet of Jahwe in Israel. At the beginning he steps upon the stage and threatens King Ahab and the kingdom with a three years drought. The reason for this is the apostasy of the king in marrying a foreign wife and thus introducing the foreign god, Melkart, the Baal of Tyre. This prediction does not move Ahab. At least nothing happens, and Elijah withdraws from Samaria.

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The following scenes in Nazareth and the wilderness are not striking from the dramatic point of view. They reveal an evidence of miraculous powers ascribed to Jahwe. Interest



is aroused when toward the end of this period King Ahab sends Obadiah for the prophet and summons him to the palace. There follows the tremendous climactic scene when Elijah re-establishes Jahwe-worship on Mount Carmel. Closely associated with this is another climactic event - Elijah's condemnation of Ahab for his unjust treatment of Naboth. This arouses queen Jezebel who threatens the prophet. He becomes frightened for his life; goes to the wilderness, and after forty days there he continues to Horeb, where it is clear to him through the "voice of gentle stillness" that the end of his career is at hand. He returns to the north country again to make his final plans for the continuance of his work as a reforming prophet.

#### AN ORATORIO

During the last century the moving Biblical account of Elijah inspired one of the greatest oratorios we have. Macduff, as biographer writing in 1868 says, "We need hardly wonder that the great German composer Mendelssohn should have selected the history of Elijah with its rapid alternation; its shifting dramatic effects, to give the loftiest and most varied expression to art of which he was so consummate a master. Mendelssohn's interpretation into music of this great life poem in which there is such abundant scope for rendering the plaintive and pathetic - as well as the grand and sublime - is in the highest sense a triumph of genius."



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## A BIOGRAPHY

If the dramatic movement of events toward climax and turning point, their order and degree of importance is now clear, the problem of understanding what actually took place is still before us. This is by far the more difficult problem for the historian. The actual events are deeply overlaid with imagery and colorings, the creative work of a reverent oriental mind. They betray the way in which Hebrew writers after Elijah wanted to think of him. At the same time and much more significantly, they disclose the tremendous effect which this man of God, had upon contemporaries and in the onmoving history of Israel. Nothing was too wonderful or spectacular in telling what happened to Elijah and his achievements.

It is possible to guess something of the nature of the events that took place. We are helped to an understanding of the Biblical records by our knowledge of the influence of Babylonian legend upon the Hebrew mind, by our present day scientific world view, especially by the tools of modern psychology which provide us handles for grasping hold of personality. We admit that we are guessing when we relate what seems to us to be the actual progress of events. For our purpose we are not interested in retelling the detailed events merely. We want to get hold of the man and his message.

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suddenness. He announces himself as standing before the Lord of hosts. He emerges from seclusion where he held converse with Heaven. Ushered onto the stage at once "he comes in with a tempest who went out with a whirlwind." He appears with no preparation (Shakespeare is not writing this drama) and addresses the king, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand -----". In his announcement his very name gives strength to his utterance, for Elijah means "Jah-weh is my God."

There are no antecedents in Elijah's history; no father, mother, friends, or companions until toward the end he chooses Elisha, a disciple. A native of the obscure transjordanic village of Thisbe, he was probably a child of poverty and inured to hardship and aloneness. He wore a coarse garment of camel's hair fastened with a leather girdle. Eternal nature had its place in his development. Gilead, his home until his appearance, was that wild, rugged, in many parts picturesque country lying east of the Jordan. It was a "rocky" region as the word implies with its deep ravines and water-courses, its sheepfolds and herds of wild cattle in contrast to Bashan - "the level or fertile land." It was a rude province compared with civilized tribes to the South of Palestine. This primitive patriarchal life survived advancing civilization. It was this remote sacred tribe, living out of the stream of roving life from Arabia, outside the path of the Bedouins, remote from Canaanitic culture



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that preserved intact the ancient religious conceptions and faith. The protest against the invasion of immoral Canaanitic culture into the mores of the Hebrew tribes and of Tyrian Baalism into Jahwe-worship came from this eastern transjordanic territory and from Southern Israel where Jahwe was still the One God of Israel. Here in this highland country of Palestine, far from the ecstatic groups of the professional prophets, away from Israel's organized priesthood, Elijah received the religion of his people, the stern rigid laws of the ethical code of Moses. There he stands before us, a muscular figure, tawny with the burning suns of Palestine, with long, shaggy raven hair hanging loose from his shoulders. It is no wonder that later generations connected another lay preacher from the hills with Elijah, the Tishbite.

Elijah's calling was to go down from Gilead and prove the fact to the king and people that Jahwe, not Melkart of Tyre, is the God of Israel. He begins by prophesying a drought before the king. In doing this he seems to interpret the weather signs as indicating Jahweh's displeasure at Israel's apostasy. He thus shares the point of view held by the J narrator who writes about this same time or a little later (i.e. 850 B.C.). Such a declaration on the part of the outstanding religious leader in Israel, when the drought did come, appeared to the people as the direct result of the prophet's words. His prediction with its accompanying



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result had the effect of winning popular feeling to Elijah's<sup>1</sup>  
as well as Jahwe's side.

Intense suffering from the drought vividly pictured as affecting even the king and his horses and men (I Kings 18:5) brought the king and the people to his side (18:1). The widespread dismay at the drought; the possibility of Elijah's coming to their rescue was a sufficient prelude to the religious revival that took place with tremendous consequence. The occasion was at hand for Elijah to proclaim his message. Accordingly, he summoned the people to Mount Carmel. They responded no doubt with great anticipation and hope for Israel's salvation. Some there were likewise who remembered Moses, and these had a deeper longing for the revival of Mosaic religion and moral idealism. On the Mount Elijah led the people in true priestly style in the worship of Jahweh of hosts.

Here was the setting for the contest between Baal and Jahweh. From the summit of Carmel the people looked westward

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<sup>1</sup> Note: The J narrator comes to the conclusion which is similar to Elijah's: Fear Yahweh and keep His commandments. Smith in Prophets of Israel, p. 210 says that "by showing the people the reasons for worship he hopes to persuade them to that fidelity which Elijah would enforce by sterner measures." Pace in Ideas of God in Israel says, p. 213, the J document should be connected with this contemporary reaction against the worship of Baal and with the prophetic summons to pure worship of Jahwe.



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and northward to the Mediterranean Sea, dotted with merchant ships of Tyre and Sidon, inward and outward bound with the riches of the world; and Tyre and Sidon in all their glory were the great strongholds of Baal. As the people looked eastward and southward, they saw the Sea of Galilee gleaming in the morning sun. There was the plain of Jezreel and Mount Tabor; southward still was Ramoth-Gilead, Ebal and Gerizim, Shechem and Shiloh and villages around which hung a thousand hallowed associations and memories of the marvelous power and loving kindness of Jehovah to their fathers.

In this setting Elijah summoned the people to the rightful worship. His striking and startling question was: "Why go ye limping between two sides?" He thunders his message "If Jehovah be God, follow Him, but if Baal then follow him." The priests of Baal (450 it is said) were there also. But the people were repulsed by their activity. The poise and balance of Elijah in the midst of his truly-inspired ecstatic preaching profoundly contrasted with the wild dancing, the meaningless exclamation, the revolting self-mutilations of the Baal priests.<sup>1</sup> The Hebrews

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though they had allowed the immoral and base elements of Canaanitic life to enter their own codes and practices, were still at heart sensitive to the ethical and religious concepts of their fathers.

This was a tremendous gesture on the part of Elijah. It had tremendous effects upon the people. How far Elijah seized upon the occasion of returning rains as an opportunity to vindicate Jahwe we cannot say. But we know that later generations associated the storm which ended the long drought with Elijah's preaching. They believed that he had prevailed upon Jahwe to renew His favor toward them. The total effect was the restoration of Mosaic Jahwism of which the eighth century prophets availed themselves in their work of reforming Israel's faith.

The other climactic experience taking place more probably after this was Elijah's condemnation of King Ahab for having illegally seized Naboth's vineyard. With the people on his side Elijah was prepared to challenge the king's injustice (21:1f). And there is evidence that he was successful, for the king is said to have repented in the primitive Hebrew fashion with sack-cloth and ashes (21:27-29) and to have received favor again from Jahwe through the prophet.

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as almost supernaturally accomplishing his work, now we see him as a human being, or as later tradition had it "a man of like passions with ourselves."<sup>1</sup> A man of God he is still capable of failure, of bitterness and even of cowardice. A reaction sets in. Jezebel, the queen, has threatened him. Enraged by the activity of the people whom Elijah has clearly aroused against the Tyrian Baal, exasperated by Elijah's interference in a subtle political move against the queen is in a mood to take high-handed measures against the prophet. Elijah hears of this. He is overwhelmed by it. The mood of victory on previous occasions gives away to the emotion of fear, of cowardice, and of bitterness against God himself. Nor can he rise to martyrdom for his faith, but flees for his life to the wilderness. There he does not escape from himself, and calls on God to take away his life. A striking utterance is his prayer "O Jehovah take my life for I am no better than my fathers."

He recovers from his depression to partake of food, then continues to the far South where Mt. Horeb is located. His sense of need drives him to the place of Jahweh's abode where Moses of old had found Him revealed.<sup>2</sup> There in the

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<sup>1</sup> James 5:17

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striking theophany of nature he had a revelation of Jahwe.  
In the silence he found himself and recovered from the  
despair and disillusion of the past days.<sup>1</sup> This marks,  
according to the Bible records, a higher level and we have  
given a higher revelation of Jahwe for Israel as well as  
for Elijah. God is revealed here as one who works in the  
calm orderly processes of nature even more effectively  
than in the wind and earthquake and fire. This is a God  
who speaks to the inner man. In the early period of Hebrew  
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the soul. At the same time Elijah had reached a new stage  
of religious experience, where Jahwe's voice was heard within.  
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Elijah emerges from this solitude on Horeb (I Kings 19:15)  
prepared to take the next step in fulfilling his task. It is  
suggested to him that he should make his influence effective

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<sup>1</sup>  
Kings 19:12. This passage is commonly misunderstood. The  
Hebrew means silence rather than whisper. It should run "---  
and after the fire, hark! a fine silence! Oesterley HI, p. 306.

Sacred Cave among the wild crags; after the passing of striking theophany of nature he had a revelation of Jehovah. In the silence he found himself and recovered from the despair and disillusion of the past days. This marks, according to the Bible records, a higher level and we have given a higher revelation of Jehovah for Israel as well as for Elijah. God is revealed here as one who works in the calm orderly processes of nature, even more effectively than in the wind and earthquake and fire. This is a God who speaks to the inner man. In the early period of Hebrew life Jehovah appeared in the majestic form. He is represented in Judges 5:4 as being present at the quaking of the mountains, in the storm and earthquake. Here Elijah has a revelation of God in the more normal activities of nature, in the gentle stillness engulfing the mountain. Such an experience was the resolution of terrible inner struggles of the soul. At the same time Elijah had reached a new stage of religious experience, where Jehovah's voice was heard within. And His appeal was to the rational and emotional nature of the prophet.

Elijah emerges from this attitude on Horob (1 Kings 19:13) prepared to take the next step in fulfilling his task. It is suggested to him that he should make his influence effective

1 Kings 19:13. This passage is commonly misunderstood. The

Hebrew means silence rather than whisper. It should read "and after the three days a time of silence" (Genesis 21:1).



through the reigning dynasty. He will choose Hazael, king over Syria; Jehu, king over Israel; and Elisha his successor in the prophetic office. He has doubtless influenced Elisha before. The record indicates that he himself never accomplished these first two tasks but that he impressed his purpose on Elisha in such a manner that Elisha **later** anointed Hazael and Jehu kings respectively over Syria and Israel.

the bones and the flesh was licked up the waste that was in the trench?" How did Elisha pass from this world? Did he not die as other men? What is to be understood by the words, "Behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and Elisha went up by a whirlwind into heaven?"

To give technical, specific, detailed answers to these questions is an impossibility. We have intimated that these stories of Elisha include non-historical elements. They are of a composite character, and while they contain a non-scientific substratum, legendary associations are present in the narratives. However, we are not to think of the narratives as having been rewritten with this miraculous element added. Either the original authors, writing some fifty or sixty years after the period in which the prophets, Elijah and Elisha, lived, are rehashing and recasting events in a more poetic than in exact history. These stirring events of a half century before

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1 I Kings 17:16      2 I Kings 18:28      3 II Kings 2:11

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## CHAPTER IV

### MIRACLE IN THE NARRATIVES OF ELIJAH

Was Elijah fed by ravens at Cherith? Is it true that "the barrel of meal wasted not, nor did the cruse of oil fail"?<sup>1</sup> What really happened on Mount Carmel where, as we are told, in answer to Elijah's prayer, "the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt-offering and the wood and the stones and the dust and licked up the waste that was in the trench"?<sup>2</sup> How did Elijah pass from this world? Did he not die as other men? What is to be understood by the words, "Behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."<sup>3</sup>?

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<sup>2</sup> I Kings 18:38

<sup>3</sup> II Kings 2:11

<sup>4</sup> See discussion of pragmatic history. The authors are teaching religious lessons from the great prophets.

CHAPTER IV

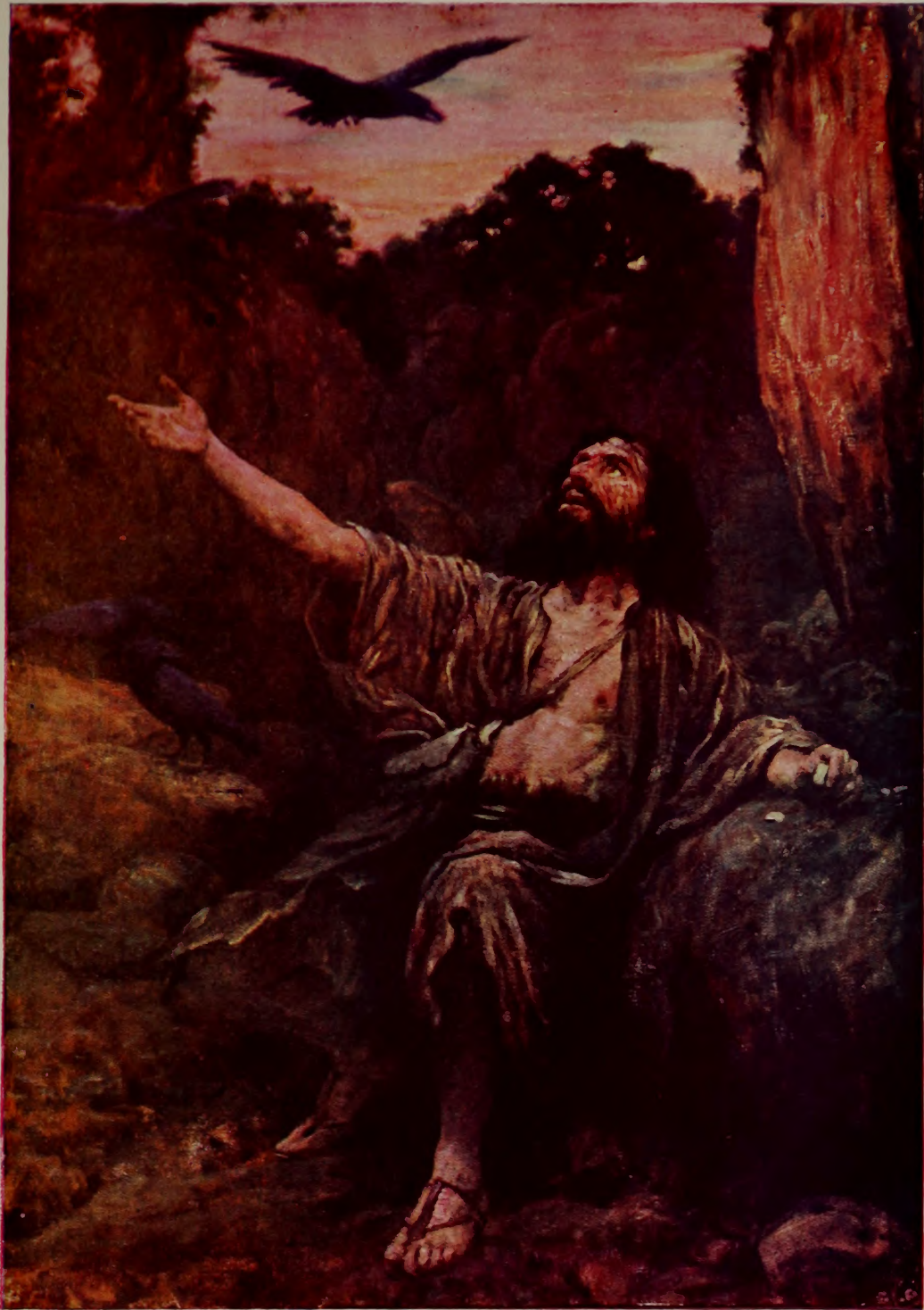
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were a part of the popular tradition. This has been simplified, concentrated into a few episodes of which Elijah is the hero and representing for later readers the prophetic struggle in the ninth century against the house of Omri.

That these papers are not fact in the scientific sense can be pointed out in the records themselves. There are inconsistencies within them. For example, Jezebel did not murder all the prophets of Jahwe (cf. I Kings 22:6; II Kings 2:3). Again, if Ahab had abandoned worship of Jahwe he would not have called his children by names, Ahaziah, Jehoram, Athaliah, etc. (II Kings 9:19ff.). Another fact in the records is that Jehu massacred the prophets of Baal and not Elijah.

On the other hand these narratives are not fiction without a basis in fact. If it could be proved that Elijah did not live, then we would have to create an Elijah to account for the Biblical narratives. They could not possibly be invention. They attest the life and message of the prophet of Jahwe in Ahab's reign. He is original, unique, afire with zeal for his God, a man of marvel who did marvelous things. He was a high-strung, intense, vigorous personality with certain extraordinary forces and power at his disposal. He had a strange appearance. He is a 'lord of hair' (II Kings 1:8), either because like a true Jahwe devotee he refrains from cutting his hair, or because he wears a cloak of skins. He appears with lightning-like suddenness and disappears as quickly. He speaks with



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tremendous religious idealism and with authority which appeals to a power super-physical and beyond his own. Nothing was more natural than that admiring souls should interpret events centering about the prophet as extraordinary. It is little wonder that in describing him tradition said he was in the end taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. That may be regarded as oriental picturesque language describing a thunder storm and Elijah himself as a kind of human lightning flash. Significant in our understanding of him is it to discover what later Jewish thought did with him. He develops into an apocalyptic figure and when Malachi 4:5<sup>3</sup> was written some centuries later he had come to hold a definite place in Jewish eschatology.

In addition to these considerations there are certain principles regarding the study of Old Testament miracles, and more specifically these miracles in the Elijah-Elisha narratives, which may guide us.

(1) It is certain that the belief in miracle in any age is closely associated with the current conception of God. Miracles performed in the stories of Elijah and Elisha reflect inferior ideas of God. God is partial; He gets angry; His mind can be changed; He is subject to His prophets. Furthermore, some of the miracles have parallels in secular folk-lore (For example, ministering ravens, the unfailing cruse, magic mantle, mysterious appearances and disappearances); the story of God's manifestations in fire reflects the traditional belief of the Semite, and some stories



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are remarkably like those of Babylonian heroes.

Another principle we have already stated; the authors are not interested in writing history. They were impressed by the miracle of personality. And in relating their impressions they did not have our finer distinctions between first cause and secondary cause, etc. An outstanding event would be the genesis of the belief in a miracle and a colorful and naïve describing of it. Before the age of scientific history and even more remote than prosaic accounts of the past is poetry. It is paradoxical that God should work in and through history in this manner. Here is the real miracle, - that God broke in upon man's mind through the categories of poetry and through ecstasy. Thus He kept Himself behind the veil. He appeared to men slowly and only as they were capable of receiving Him.<sup>1</sup> For the more naïve and unreflective mind He was apparent only in the extraordinary and incalculable events of Nature.

A third principle in interpreting miracle in the Old Testament is this; In a pre-scientific age, there existed no notion of natural law. The ancient mind was incapable of perceiving the impossibility and the naïvete of a prophet's changing the laws of the universe. A man of God, he could bring a rain or a

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drought at will. The ancient mind was superstitious; at the same time reverent. There was no way of determining what was natural and what was not. They were unaware of laws, at the same time they were sensitive to powers beyond themselves. And a simple event to us was for them a marvel.

A fourth principle for our understanding the miracles is one which roots them in the religious nature. They were written in response to this need in the human soul for establishing the truth about God. In an age when we have both the Bible and science as revelations of God we do not appreciate the fact that former generations had to have a sign. Even Jesus could not overcome the demand for the unusual and abnormal. He protested "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe." And He steadfastly set himself against miracle as a way of giving God to men. His followers did not succeed in following Him on this point. They continued to teach that God was in the abnormal, unusual, spectacular. They made even the person of Jesus so abnormal that He was impossible to many men. But they did this, not consciously heedless of the warnings of Jesus, but out of the sense of need for establishing God's reputation, His wonder and greatness. His greatest miracle is giving men a Savior in Jesus Christ.

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is at stake. Nothing less than a miracle would vindicate Him. What could be more natural than that God should have sent fire from Heaven and decided in His favor once and for all. He had demonstrated Himself in His fire to former ages. Why not now? Gunkel believes this is a dream of a later writer. He wished to believe that this miracle had happened. And he wanted to think that the prophet slaughtered the Baal priests with his own hand. "Later generations cannot bear to think that the highly venerated man should, like the rest of us, have to depend in his life time on aspiration and faith, and they were also offended by the secular method by which the Baal was ultimately rooted out of Israel."<sup>1</sup> According to Gunkel, the account in II Kings 9-10 of the extermination of the Baal-priests by Jehu, under the instigation of Elisha, is historical. Again, the Horeb scene took place in actuality. He emphasizes the contrast between Elijah's triumph on Carmel in I Kings 18 and his dejection at Horeb in 19 when he laments that he is alone, misunderstood, and weary of un-availing strife. "Here", he says, "history and legend stand side by side; the lament is historical; the great triumph which the historical Elijah did not live to see is legendary."<sup>2</sup>

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Thus Gunkel separates fact and legend. It is true that to make these narratives appeal to reason and to appreciate them we are justified in rationalizing them as far as possible. This is as necessary to us as it was for the ancients to clothe simple events in the garment of miracle. Perhaps Professor Gunkel has access to sufficient knowledge to separate fact and fancy in our narratives. But our impression is that miracle and fact are so bound up together here that to call one narrative historical and another legend is hardly warranted. The narrative in II Kings 13:21 reflects the historical significance of the prophets as well as the supernaturalism that grew up about them as their lives were related to succeeding generations. It was said here of a man's body placed in Elisha's tomb that "as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood on his feet." Such was tradition. Tradition has left the narratives as they



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#### RELIGION IN 9TH CENTURY ISRAEL

amid the political, the economic, and the social changes of Israel before and during this period, religious changes inevitably took place. These are of primary importance for religion was the most significant aspect of Israel's life and history. Among those who looked with favor upon Canaanite religion three rather clear-cut attitudes emerged. First, there appeared a denial by some of Yahwe and the acceptance of the Baalim and the worship accompanying it. Then a second larger group gave double devotion to Baal and Yahweh simultaneously. A third and the prevailing tendency probably, though not always clearly distinguished from the second attitude, directed religious devotion to Yahwe and a Yahwe whose being and attributes had been identified to a larger degree with those of the Baal. These

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## CHAPTER V

### ELIJAH'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR ISRAEL'S RELIGION

We have with intention left the most important aspect of our discussion, namely, the significance of Elijah for Israel's religious faith, until this point. The view we have of Israel's political organization and of her social and economic life; the grasp we have obtained of the Biblical and archeological sources of our knowledge; the intimate portrait we have painted of Elijah himself; all furnish us the background for the final appraisal of Elijah's prophetic message.

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attitudes began to take form in Hebrew history after the time of Moses, i.e. when the Hebrews entered Canaan and confronted polytheistic Baalism with their monolatrous Jahwism.. We shall discuss each of these three attitudes as a background for our appraisal of Elijah.

In the first place, it is evident that among the Israelites were some who, having married foreign wives and adopted foreign customs, took over belief in the foreign gods. These forgot Jahwe. They came into a baser form of religion in their worship of the Baalism and Astarte, the goddess of the land.

They transferred loyalty and devotion away from Jahwe to the gods of the land. We have repeated complaints of this kind of apostasy from the writers of Israel's history during this period.

But we are not to think of any large number of persons in Israel as denying the ancestral faith. Much of the charge of apostasy is the bias of a Judean writer recording impressions many years after actual events. There were too many advantages in the religion of Jahwe for large numbers to reject it. Besides, the mass of the people may be depended upon to stay by the faith of their fathers, if not in its orthodox form, at least in its fundamental character. What is true of social and political conservatism among the mass of the Israelites, is even more in conservative religious faith. The tribes coming into Canaan had Jahwe as their national God. "Jahwe would be Israel's God and Israel Jahwe's people." This often repeated formula seems to express



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the guiding idea of the activity of Moses.<sup>1</sup> Just as in the exodus from Egypt Israel could be counted on to respond to their Jahwe-God, so now the heart of Israel is Jahwe-minded.<sup>2</sup> We must think of charges of apostasy as belonging rightfully to individuals such as the king and court politicians who were out of touch with the people and for political expediency allowed Canaanitic practices and foreign gods to enter Israel. Contamination of Hebrew religion was, by no means uniform. Cities took over Canaanitic religion while border peoples, especially in the South and East, retained the habits and outlook of the desert. To these latter the ethic of Samaria was abhorrent. They clung to the simpler, purer standards of pastoral life. Elijah was their representative.

A second attitude was one of double devotion, - the worship of Jahwe and the baals of the land of Canaan simultaneously. This represents a larger group than the first. The Israelites to a large extent believed with desert people generally, that the baals of the land of Canaan would be better acquainted with agriculture than their own national God. After all these baals of Canaan were intimate with the people, giving them their bread and water, their wool and flax, their oil and their drink (Hosea 2:5) And it followed as a matter of course that the act of settling in the

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<sup>1</sup> Lods, p. 311.

<sup>2</sup> "The earliest text of importance, i.e. The Song of Deborah, comes from the period of Israel's Exodus. Its appeal is based on the assumption that Jahwe is able to awaken a universal response. (Lods, p. 404.)



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2 "The earliest text of importance, i.e. The Song of Deborah, comes from the period of Israel's exodus. Its appeal is based on the assumption that Yahwe is able to awaken a universal response. (Ibid., p. 304.)



territory of a foreign god carries with it the duty of rendering him the worship to which he is entitled.<sup>1</sup>

The Baals had a strong fascination for the Hebrews, and the worship-practices of the Canaanites made their appeal to the Hebrew mind. The Canaanitic sanctuaries had in them all the resources of a superior civilization making the people rejoice before their god. Furthermore, every locality in the land was presided over by its Baal. There was Baal-elosh ('lord of the promotory'), Baal-saphon ('lord of the north'), Baal shamim ('lord of the skies'), and Melkart ('god of the town') who was also known as the Tyrian Baal.

How different Jahwe! He remained in solitary majesty on the rugged peaks of Sinai, or marched through the tempest to battle for Israel. In contrast to the warm and sensuous nature-worship of the Canaanites, so peculiarly fascinating to the passionate Semitic temperament, Jahwe-worship was austere with stern ethical demands instilling awe and self-discipline. Nevertheless, the claims of Jahwe were not easily shaken off. In fact, the mass of the people in the ninth century probably felt in a confused way that it would have been better to have adhered to the austere faith of the fathers. While inevitably adopting Canaanitic Baals they continued to give their devotion to the nationalist God, Jahwe.

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David regards it as self-evident that to banish a man is the equivalent of saying to him, "Go, serve other Gods." (I sam. 26:19; see also I Kings 9:6).



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I David regards it as self-evident that to punish a man is the equivalent of saving to him, "Go, serve other gods." (I Sam. 26:19; see also I Kings 18:21.)



This was possible to the Hebrew mind, for as they believed, the immigrant into a new territory did not involve the necessity of forsaking the god of his fathers. And although Jahwe still had his main seat at Horeb even down to Elijah's day (I Kings 19:8), nevertheless he had been brought by the Hebrews into Canaan. Jahwe was bound to the tribe and was the guardian deity of his people even in the territory of other gods. (II Kings 1:1-4)

We may assume that king Ahab shared this attitude of double devotion to Jahwe and the Baals of the land of Canaan. His marriage to Jezebel meant no more for him than did foreign marriage for David or Solomon. There was no intentional apostasy from Jahwe-worship on his part. Rather, he adopted the gods of the foreign territory as a political expediency. This is certain in Ahab's case since he names his sons in recognition of Jahwe, and on occasions demanding outside counsel he called on the prophets of Israel (Elijah and Micaiah). A group of Jahwe prophets was maintained at court by the king until the coming of Jezebel (I Kings 18:3-4) and according to I Kings 22:13 it was a crime against the state to adjure Jahwe and the king.

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In Elijah's day a third attitude had developed in Israel. It was that of devotion to Yahwe as sole object of worship, but Yahwe with all the titles and attributes of the Baals now



transferred to him. Double-devotion was in constant danger of subjecting Jahwe to an inferior place. Syncretism had gone so far that Baal and Jahwe were practically identical in the minds of the people. Sometimes the emphasis was on Baal. Such names as Jerubaal (Gideon), Eshbaal (son of Saul), Meribbaal (Son of Jonathan) etc. prove that there was no scruple in using the term<sup>1</sup> Baal in designating the God of Israel. At other times the emphasis is on Jahwe. He was Israel's Baal. Jeroboam, while he worshipped the bull images in Dan and Bethel and called them Baalism, named his son and successor Abijah ('Yahweh is my father'). There was no conscious conflict in the minds even of the kings before Elijah's day. It is not until Hosea's day and from the standpoint of Judean authorship that an unfavorable view and the charge of apostasy were taken against them.

However, greatly Jahwism was enriched by this influx of heterogeneous elements, and in spite of all the syncretism and similarity which followed the amalgamation of Canaanitic and Hebrew religion, nevertheless Jahwism was still unique. There were immoral and degenerate practices in Canaanitic religion which the Hebrew conscience could not accept. The need, therefore, was for someone to articulate the inarticulate, the fears and hopes of the mass. This was Elijah's task; he fulfilled it as a lay preacher from wild Gilead.

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Jack, J.W., p. 144.



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## ELIJAH'S PROPHETIC MESSAGE

While the subtle syncretistic movement, which was being felt throughout Israel and in Elijah's remote province, was no doubt sufficient to arouse the prophet to become active in Israel, the specific challenge seems to have come when King Ahab married the Tyrian queen, Jezebel. This marriage to a foreign wife meant that a sanctuary to Melkart would be built in Samaria. And the idolatry of Tyre, the maintenance of a wanton priesthood, the practice of child sacrifice as a part of Phoenician worship would thus be countenanced and unconsciously adopted by Israel. Jezebel was an energetic personality. She was a militant religionist, bringing into the palace her priests and stirring up Jahweh's deepest anger with her oppression and cruelty. Elijah realized that, if Phoenician religion obtained a prominent place in Israel, the result would be a gigantic step downward, not only religiously but socially and morally. Elijah employs drastic imagery to describe Israel. The nation is like a man lame in both legs. "Why", exclaimed the prophet, -----"Why go ye limping between two opinions?" For him it was possible that Yahweh would in the course of time come to be thought of as a kind of Tyrian Baal, no better than the sensuous and corrupt deities of other lands. This possibility fired him with a great message. And he dares even to go before the king. The substance of his message on Carmel



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is felt in his first appearance in Samaria before the king; "If Jahwe be God then serve him; if Baal, then serve him." Elijah's task is to vindicate Jahwe of hosts, to strike the death blow to Baalism, to deliver Israel purged and made new for succeeding generations.

#### ELIJAH AND BAAL

Scholarship divides on the specific question, what was Elijah's attitude toward Baal-worship? The answer to this question is important for the light it throws on Elijah's contribution to Israel's religion. Among the scholars three different answers are given.<sup>1</sup> First of all, some contend that Elijah had no intention of denying the existence of Baal or his proper divinity in his own sphere. "It is evident," says H.P. Smith, "that Elijah had no intention of denying the existence of Baal or his proper divinity in his own sphere. He went to Sidon where the very Baal whom he opposed in Israel had his home, and remained quiet under his protection."<sup>2</sup> This point of view seems to be akin to that of critics like Wellhausen who believe that the struggle with Baal cannot have possessed the importance attributed to it, and who contend that influence attributed to Elijah is appraised much too highly.<sup>1</sup> Kuenen, Stade, Duhm, and other critics besides Wellhausen are inclined toward this point of view. They depreciate the religion of

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Israel from its foundation by Moses until the coming of<sup>1</sup>  
the great eighth century prophets.

A second group of scholars see in Elijah's attitude to Baal a complete rejection of his existence. "The ridicule," says Kautzsch, "which he pours upon the vain efforts of the prophets of Baal goes essentially beyond the sphere of henotheism and is equivalent to a complete denial, not only of the power but of the very existence of<sup>2</sup> Baal." H.G. Mitchell is also of this point of view.<sup>3</sup> These scholars are naturally extravagant in their estimate of Elijah's work. They would make the prophet out to be a monotheist. Welch says that although he was not zealous for intellectual monotheism, "his attitude at Carmel shows he had reached a position which cannot be distinguished from monotheism."<sup>4</sup>

A third and more correct estimate of Elijah is that he was not a monotheist. He does not deny that the gods of the other nations exist. At the same time Jahwe was for him the supreme deity in Israel. Tyre might worship Melkart and As-tarte, Lebanon might have the Baal- Lebanon for its god, but for Israel there was one God. Thus Elijah stands in the line of the Mosaic tradition. After Moses he is the one prophetic figure to emerge in vindicating the rights of Israel's God<sup>5</sup> revealed on Sinai.

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<sup>1</sup> Summarized by J.W. Jack, p. 140 <sup>3</sup> Ethics of O.T., p. 88

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## THE IMMEDIATE OCCASION OF PROPHECY

The general tendency of Israel toward syncretism is not the immediate cause of Elijah's emergence from Gilead. If he was aware of subtle, indirect influx of Canaanitic religion into Hebrew thought, we are not told that he did anything about it. Elijah stepped forth on the scene only when the supremacy of Jahwe was challenged. When the militant Jezebel introduced the Tyrian god, Melkart, and the goddess, Astarte, into Israel, with all the appearance of making them opponents of Jahweh, Elijah is fired with indignation. He is gripped with the momentousness of the event. He is aroused to speak. How much he was influenced by intellectual considerations, i.e. the introduction of an new principle, we can not say.<sup>1</sup> He seems to be motivated by a tremendous religious devotion and by the mighty conviction that one god rules Israel. The text of his life is, "Let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel and that I am thy servant." (I Kings 18:36).

## ELIJAH AND NABISM

In his prophetic message Elijah appears to stand alone. Yet he could not have won the great following that he did, had it not been that the people were ready for his message. Besides the feeling dormant in the heart-life of Israel that it would be best to retain the old religious faith in Jahweh

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and the moral code of nomadic times, a definite connection with this past had been kept up by the professional religionists of the day. They were called 'sons of the prophets' or the Nebiim. The movement was called by later Hebrew writers, Nabism. We first hear about them under Samuel. At Ramah, which was his home, and at Gibeah, and later Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho, gathered companies of men whose task it was felt to be the preservation of Israel's inspiring history. Men like this are an important part in the creation of a national conscience. And although in Elijah's lifetime these persons do not seem to be organized in the same definite way as in Elisha's day, and although Elijah apparently carried on his prophetic activities independently of them, (He is mentioned as coming in contact with them toward the end of his life in the Elishan narrative II Kings 2), nevertheless they were active in Israel. These men embodied the old mistrust which tent-dwellers have for city folk and culture. They it was who developed the potentialities of the national character. They strove against foreign influences. However much they may be said to have taken sides with the king (in Ahab's day in the great struggle between Jahwe and the Tyrian Baal, 400 prophets of Jahwe were on the side of the king), before the eighth century they were the leaven in the lump of Israel's corporate life which would gradually transform Israel into a nation of moral greatness and spiritual domination.

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Elijah differed from the Nabim in the manner in which he was induced to prophetic utterance. The real cleavage between



himself and them was at the point of method. Nabism is a form of collective ecstasy, accompanied by songs and dances after the manner of dervishes. It is not peculiar to the Hebrews. But Elijah made use of no such method as these physical and psychical inducements to the utterance of a prophetic message. That the element of ecstasy was present is unquestionable. But that Elijah made no use of trance, of wild behavior and of dance is likewise clear. He contrasts with the priests of Baal and with the Nebiim at this point. (I Kings 18:28, 36). On Carmel he stands alone "with outstretched hands beside the altar he restored and prays to Jahwe in ordered and articulate speech".<sup>1</sup> And all the time he seems to be aware of the superior quality of his utterance.

In a deeper sense Elijah is like the Nebiim, and when he wanted a successor he chose Elisha who appears to have been identified with one of these 'schools of the prophets'. Elijah is in line with those who sound forth the note of moral energy in defending the laws of Jahwe. He is a product of religious individualism toward which the prophetic ecstasy of the Nebiim pointed. A humble layman he received the suggestion that, if he were possessed by the spirit, he might become the counsellor and reprover of kings and the guide of the nation. He did not submit to the gregarious tendency which prevailed in these circles, nor was he dependent on the power of the

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Welch, p. 46.



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king or the mass of the people for his livelihood.

A full description of the nature of Elijah's prophetic message would involve a discussion of the psychological factors involved. One would need to be well informed regarding the psychological nature of religious experience and of prophecy to report this completely. We have suggested a few of the factors in Elijah's psychological equipment in the preface of our paper. At this point we content ourselves with the present discussion, critical and historical, of Elijah's influence upon politics and religion of the ninth century.

#### ELIJAH'S ENDURING MESSAGE

The great work of Elijah is in the developing movement of Israel's faith. We have seen how this influence upon the reigning dynasty is limited. The present was not the opportunity for any kind of lasting reform in government. (page 20). Politics in Ahab's reign was bound to decline. The state is breaking up. The following dynasty of Jehu is one of even greater confusion and disintegration. Jehu took unscrupulous and high-handed means to root out Baalism. What Elijah had sought to do with moral suasion and religious zeal, Jehu resolved to accomplish by wholesale massacre.<sup>1</sup> The tradition is probably true that Jehu was Elijah's candidate and that Elisha's choice of Jehu was the outcome

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It must not be understood that Elijah's activity was free from blood. He had inherited a belief in an intolerant wrathful deity. In defense of his God Elijah is said to have slaughtered 450 Baal priests (I Kings 18:40). In the episode in II Kings 1:17-19 the prophet justifies wholesale destruction of his enemies to accomplish his purpose.



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of previous coaching on the part of his predecessor. Viewing the result of Elijah's activity from a political point of view therefore, we might say that he opened the way for the bloody revolution and unscrupulous ambition of Jehu, and lay bare the frontier of the land to the ravages of ferocious Hazael.<sup>1</sup>

But the enduring work of the prophet was in religion. In the ninth century he planted the seeds of reformation and revival which were to spring up in the following century and bring forth the flower of moral idealism and religious perfection such as Israel had never yet witnessed. Elijah was not a mere patriot to whom the state stood above every other consideration. If he had been he would not have insisted that the truth which he uttered be judged by deeper and nobler standards than those set up by the nation. For Elijah Jahwe was greater than the state. If it was a choice between the state and the worship of Jahwe, Elijah choose the latter. He was one of the first absolutists so far as Israel's religion was concerned. Without him it is doubtful whether Israel would have given birth to her great religious and ethical message in the following century. And however limited and inadequate Elijah's vision of Jahwe may have been, this vision produced Elijah. His faith in the one God of Israel was the source of his passionate and dynamic message. No greater tribute can be paid than to say that because he had spoken

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W.R. Smith, p. 71f.



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with uncompromising boldness and fearlessness, the prophets of the eighth century were able to start with a belief in Jahwe which formed the foundation for their higher discovery of God. Through them God revealed himself as a universal Deity or an absolute ethical God, or a God of love and righteousness. While we may view Elijah's work as a revival of the Jahwe worship of Moses, there is a new element in the very personality of Elijah and in his adaptation of Jahwism to the contemporary life of Israel. He is a true prophet of Israel for he speaks regardless of consequences. And his utterance is in the nature of one having authority. One critic has said that, to judge from his irony, he had already risen to the belief in Jahwe as the sole God of the universe. (I Kings 18:27).

#### ELIJAH, A TRUE PROPHET

We have used the expression, a true prophet, in describing Elijah. By this we mean that he is in the line of Israel's great religious personages, and is a kind of connecting link between the thirteenth century of Moses and the eighth and following centuries of the canonical prophets. Elijah is a true prophet in the religious sense in his devotion to the one supreme God in Israel, Jahweh of Hosts. Elijah utters his message from inner conviction, with a sense of its urgency and a careless indifference toward consequences which were certain

with unassuming boldness and fearlessness, the prophets of the eighth century were able to start with a belief in Yahweh which formed the foundation for their higher discovery of God. Through them God revealed himself as a universal deity or an absolute ethical God, or a God of love and righteousness. While we may view Elijah's work as a revival of the Yahweh worship of Moses, there is a new element in the very personality of Elijah and in his relation of Yahweh to the contemporary life of Israel. He is a true prophet of Israel for he speaks regardless of consequences. And his utterance is in the nature of one having authority. One critic has said that, to judge from his irony, he had already risen to the belief in Yahweh as the sole God of the universe. (I Kings 18:37).

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to be tremendous against his own person. Elijah is also a true prophet from the ethical point of view. He stands with the eighth and seventh century personages of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah in his emphasis upon the ethical obligations of Jahweh-worship. The genius of Israelite religion from Moses day on has been ethical application contained in the Code of the Covenant and written upon the hearts of the people by the teachers and preachers of the law. It stood in sharp contrast to the nature religion and degenerate moral life of those races surrounding Israel. This moral and ethical idealism in Israel's faith had a way of asserting itself every once in a while. At least one outstanding event after Moses and previous to Elijah is recorded, in which an Israelite proclaimed the righteousness of God before the king. This is Nathan's arraignment of David for his sin against Uriah, the Hittite. (II Samuel 12). The striking scene in Elijah's career and one which we may believe sounds the keynote of his whole life message is his condemnation of king Ahab for his illegal seizure of Naboth's vineyard. It will be remembered that the ideal from nomadic days was social equality. "For the nomad wealth carries with it neither influence nor power. At the most it involves the privilege of more lavish hospitality."<sup>1</sup> But this principle was violated in Canaan. The acquisition of property led to competition for the largest gain.

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<sup>1</sup> Lods, p. 397.

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Amos points out in 8:5 how it was possible to amass wealth by shrewd dealings in land and crops. A further development was the adoption of a mode of life increasingly removed from primitive simplicity, which meant the introduction of divisions or class distinction into Israel's society. Amos tells how the rich demand palaces modelled on those of the king, with the luxuries of winter and summer houses, feasts in which meat was a daily dish, and where<sup>1</sup> wine was drunk in bowls to the sound of music.

Elijah's denunciation of the king for his plot against Naboth is an outburst of this nomadic ideal latent in Israel's religion and her moral code from Moses. How significant an event it was may be gathered from its effect upon the people who were stirred to resentment. Also it marks the prediction of doom and death to Ahab and his family (I Kings 21). Elijah well understood that the people under tutelage of Jahwe's prophets would not tolerate so dastardly a betrayal. And Elijah was right, for in the main II Kings 25-26, which recounts the<sup>2</sup> circumstances of the end of Ahab's dynasty is reliable. This episode is noteworthy further in suggesting that the prophetic movement inspired by Elijah in the ninth century was social as well as religious. Ahab had treacherously destroyed a family in Israel, hence his house must perish, and a new dynasty must take its place.

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Amos 3:15; 6:4-6.

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The writer evidently flounders in his attempt to adjust the details to the prophet's prediction.



Amos points out in 8:3 how it was possible to amass wealth by shrewd dealings in land and crops. A further development was the adoption of a mode of life increasingly removed from primitive simplicity, which meant the introduction of divisions or class distinctions into Israel's society. Amos tells how the rich demanded palaces modeled on those of the king, with the luxuries of winter and summer houses, feasts in which meat was a daily dish, and where wine was drunk in bowls to the sound of music.

Elizah's denunciation of the king for his plot against Naboth is an outgrowth of this nomadic ideal latent in Israel's religion and her moral code from Moses. How significant an event it was may be gathered from its effect upon the people who were stirred to resentment. Also it marks the prediction of doom and death to Ahab and his family (1 Kings 21). Elizah well understood that the people under tutelage of Jahwe's prophets would not tolerate so blatantly a betrayal. And Elizah was right, for in the main 11 Kings 22-23, which recounts the circumstances of the end of Ahab's dynasty is reliable. This episode is noteworthy further in suggesting that the prophetic movement inspired by Elizah in the ninth century was social as well as religious. Ahab had treacherously destroyed a family in Israel, hence his house must perish, and a new dynasty must take its place.

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The writer evidently flourishes in his attempt to adjust the details to the prophet's prediction.



The defence of justice and the demands of righteousness made by Elijah are as important a factor in his message as his vindication of Jahweh and his restoration of Jahweh to His rightful place in Israel. The blow which Elijah made against the king, the queen, and a royal house politically significant in its representation of the national idea, is one of the surprising and impressive events in history. It changed the course of things. And when in the following century Amos was stirred by the state of affairs in declining Israel, he was not without a precedent in his message of social justice. Elijah foreshadows the significant ethical revival of the great prophets. He was a prophet of doom, and therefore does not share Jeremiah's denunciation of prophets who teach the people vanity and lying dreams.<sup>1</sup> Elijah is fearless in his arraignment of a king who had transgressed the laws of Jahweh. Doom was inevitable from the very nature of Jahweh, a God of righteousness, and of his nation, Israel, which had been taught His righteousness from its earliest days.

It is clear then, that whatever stood between Elijah and his successors in Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and the other literary prophets, was the necessary limitation of thought about the nation in his century. He does not, for example see that it is the nation itself which is corrupt to the core and doomed

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Jeremiah 23:16ff.

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to destruction. He shares the belief of other men of insight like Micaiah and Elisha, who lived in his day, and saw only a guilty dynasty. The prophetic message which was later to break forth in condemnation of the entire nation, was now in the making, a prophecy of doom against the house of Ahab.

#### CONCLUSION

Later generations saw Elijah as a counterpart of Moses. That is where the New Testament places him. As for prophets like Amos and Isaiah and Jeremiah who followed him, Elijah shares the limitation of those who make Jahwism a national religion confined to Israel. At the same time he is like them in their supra-national character. His message was greater than the state. His belief in Jahwe was not dependent upon the king nor the people. Later generations saw in Elijah a titanic personality towering over his time in solitary grandeur. Poetry and not history merely could best preserve the memory of him, so deep was the impression that with him Israel had entered into a new and higher revelation of God and of righteousness.

#### SUMMARY

Elijah, the Tishbite, was a prophet of Israel. Living in Ahab's reign, i.e. between 875-853 B.C. he is in the line of Israel's true prophets and forms the connecting link between Moses of the thirteenth century and the literary prophets of

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the eighth century and following.

Elijah is among the pre-literary prophets. He did not write the story of his century nor the message he received from Jahwe. And Elisha, his immediate successor, has left no written record of the significant events of Elijah's life, especially of the three years in which he makes his impress upon Israel. Thus, the difficulty of getting hold of this man and his message is evident. We must understand that our records are meager. They are confined to a short space of his actual prophesying in Israel, - i.e. three years, and they deal with a few specific events. Furthermore, these events have been written in narrative form some fifty or seventy-five years after Elijah's day, i.e. around 800-775 B.C. But we are assured on the other hand of the authenticity of our records by the clear fact that the prophet is still fresh in the minds of those who were closest to him and told the story of his life, - probably lesser unnamed persons in the schools of the prophets of his day. And by the date of their writing, the stories of the prophet's accomplishments have become a part of the sagas of the people. As such, the facts about Elijah appear in our Biblical narratives overlaid with legendary material, oriental coloring and imaginative elements. Our author is clearly a poet and not interested in history as we know history today. But the element of heightened



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literary style, of exaggeration and miracle, only serve to assure us of Elijah's titanic personality and his mighty impress upon the Israel of his day.

The chief facts to be borne in mind about Elijah's century is that it is one of decline. Politically the nation is breaking up, though this is not yet apparent to the people or even the religious leaders. It seems to writers telling about the events of the period some few years later that Israel is a nation of considerable political prominence and stability. This is the point of view of the Assyrian monarch, Shalmaneser III, who acknowledges Ahab's part in repelling more or less successfully for Israel the first Assyrian invasion (854 B.C.). And the author of I Kings 20 and 22 makes out Ahab as a hero, courageous and capable. The alliance of Ahab with Syria by marriage was seen as a step in making secure Israel's place among the nations. Actually Israel was degenerating. Her internal life was imperilled by cleavages between king and people and between groups of the citizenry. The reasons for decline were to be found in the unjust social relationships and the economic inequality existing in the nation. King Ahab was out of touch with the genius of the nation's tradition with reference to social and political organization. The real Israel still clung to the ideals of nomadic days.



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This ideal was in direct opposition to class distinctions based on economic wealth, which had grown up in Israel after her settlement in Canaan, and by Ahab's day had become the accepted rule in estimating a man's worth. Furthermore, the nomadic spirit distrusted kingship with its accoutrements of centralized authority, preeminence, and supremacy. This opposition was expressed by conservatives within the nation, particularly by the Rechabites, a party made up of the old nomadic element.

But a mere civil rebellion on political and social grounds was ineffectual. And the Rechabites with Jehonadab as their leader never accomplished much in reforming these evils.

A more fundamental cause of Israel's decline which showed itself in social unrest, political instability, and economic injustice, was to be found in a degenerate moral condition. It was not popular in this century to quote Moses, the fountain-head of Israel's moral code. Yet in spite of this, Israel could not escape the conviction that she ought to reform her life to restore again Mosaic principles of living. Along with this was the conviction that the nation ought to return to the true worship of Jahwe. This conviction is apparent from Israel's response to the preaching of Elijah. The significant thing about Elijah is that he was not one who had accepted the status quo of his century. He was different,



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and his message had the effect of inspiring new harmonies in the souls of men. At the same time Elijah's preaching compelled a hearing, as if another like Elijah had once played upon the heart strings of these people. This is to say that Elijah re-echoed the religious and ethical message of Moses. This is the significance of the two chief events recorded about him (1) his revival of true Jahweh-worship on Mt. Carmel; (2) His pronouncement of doom upon king Ahab and his house for transgression of the Mosaic ethical code in the instance of Naboth's vineyard. And the third scene of Elijah on Mt. Horeb recalls the earlier revelation of Himself and His will, which Jahweh vouchsafed to Moses.

The significance of Elijah's message may be seen in its effect upon Israel's religious and ethical life. He saved the day for Jahwism and united the people of Israel again to their God. He reasserted the nomadic ideal of equality between rich and poor, between the king and an ordinary citizen. He foresaw the consequences to the existing dynasty of continued apostasy and transgression. Only indirectly and in a smaller way did Elijah effect a change in political and social life. In fact he can not be said to have helped immediate conditions at all, for the succeeding dynasty under Jehu was in no way a step upward. It was in many ways a disastrous step, for it brought a holy war with wholesale massacre, inquisition, and bigotry of the worst kind.



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We are speculating when we say that Israel perished in the following century because of her own inherent failure to maintain her standards. It is possible that Israel, however healthy in her internal life would, in the end, have had to give way to Assyria. Material success is never guaranteed by moral and spiritual health. Nevertheless, it is clear that there was a social and political cancer within the body politic which had inevitable consequences ending in ruin. This diseased Israel was doomed. Israel was to lose her life and thereby find it. By shaking off her mortal coil - a corrupt body - she was to gain a new life for her spirit. In the days of her material poverty the spiritual message of her prophets had a chance. And for the sake of this message no price was too great, not even the loss of the nation. This was the judgment of the prophets themselves. It was the opinion of those spiritual leaders who followed them. It is our profound conviction and we thank Israel for it.





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